



Many birds, like this Blue Tit, will make the most of fruit trees.

## Create an area of shade

Providing an area of shade can help increase the biodiversity of your garden, and **Jenny Steel** tells us how to create the perfect shady spot.

However small your garden, it is good to try to include different habitats if you are hoping to make it special for your local wildlife and increase its biodiversity. Nectar-rich borders are good for attracting butterflies and bees, a wildlife pond is great for amphibians and dragonflies, and a mini-meadow attracts all sorts of invertebrates and small mammals. However, there is one habitat we can create that is good for almost all the wildlife that might visit our gardens, and that is an area that has some aspects of wild woodland. If your garden is tiny, this might sound rather ambitious, but in effect it simply means making a small shady spot somewhere or adapting existing shady places to make them more attractive to a wide range of wildlife.

Shade is created in our gardens in many ways. Fences, house walls and existing trees and shrubs, whether in our own gardens or our neighbours', will inevitably produce shade at some times of the day. Rather than battle with these spots, we can take advantage of them by including shade-loving plants

such as *Heuchera*, *Lamium* or hellebores, plus we can plant honeysuckle or other climbers to clamber up fences or walls. The soil beneath can then be mulched with bark or compost and a small twig or log pile can be added to enhance the habitat and create damp, sheltered conditions.

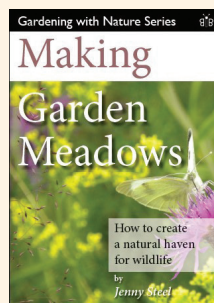
If you have very little in the way of shade in your garden you could create a perfect, tiny 'woodland edge' by planting a dense evergreen shrub such as *Viburnum tinus* or Holly. You can add a few native shade-loving plants such as Bluebell, Yellow Archangel, Stitchwort, Red Campion and violets to attract nectar-seeking invertebrates, and again mulch the area with bark or compost and add twigs, leaves and small logs.

If you have more space you could plant a suitable tree but don't underestimate the amount of shade it might cast on your neighbours' gardens. A good choice would be a small apple tree or a Crab Apple such as the red fruited variety 'Sentinel' which provides nectar and pollen for bees, plus birds will enjoy the ripe fruits in late autumn and winter. Again complete your shady habitat with small logs, leaves and twigs to attract everything from shade-loving butterflies such as Speckled Wood to newts, toads, overwintering moth pupae, Wood Mice and possibly even your local Hedgehog.

**Jenny Steel** is a plant ecologist, author of several books on wildlife gardening and has been a Garden BirdWatcher for 21 years!

More from Jenny:  
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More information, and book sales, can be found on Jenny's website.



A Speckled Wood butterfly in the shade.